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Way back 40-odd years ago, my first editor, Stanley Frank, stopped writing titles for my stuff. Were he back today, he'd change my choice of "Stage-Struck In Santa Fe" to plain "Shortgrass Country."

Your forbearance will be appreciated for bringing up the subject of titles. The stage-struck notion hit at a chamber music concert at the St. Francis Auditorium the first of August, here in Santa Fe.

During intermission, a big, tall, hefty hombre in a dark suit told a pal he'd been to three operas and five concerts in four days and three nights. "Santa Fe," he said, "fills with arts day or night time."

His pal's assent was hard to read unless you read signs by chin bobbing. Double chins make for further difficult interpretation. Probably he was doing a sympathy dip, shared only between the two of them.

Where the title worked in was here is that two husbands waiting outside a ladies restroom who probably preferred big league baseball or lesser league mud wrestling over chamber music and opera scores were putting on a big show that they liked classical music.

Once news racks in grocery stores became covered in magazines titled "Can this Marriage Last Until Press Time?"

or "Will Hollywood Stars Stay Together for Three Weeks To Win a Bet," husbands became super-sensitive to pleasing wives.

Also, it could have stemmed from enough husbands forgetting birthdays and anniversaries to partially fill pretty big concert halls. Back in my married days, floral companies profited heavily from marital disputes and husbands' omissions. Waterloo Floral in Angelo delivered bouquets down to the final court dates on divorces.

Right at that moment the idea hit that these guys are on stage. They are playing a role. They have convinced their wives and themselves that they preferred being here for tonight's performance of Bach over, say, the aura of dugouts, flashes of locker rooms, thrills of long fielded balls, the crouch of umpires, and shots of home plates.

Back to the three-opera, five-concert guy. If he went to that many programs, why wasn't he sleepy? Think that over. I don't know how long operas last. You have to go to find out for sure. Writing and ranching take too much attention to spare hours under the stars watching an opera in an open-air New Mexico theater.

Operas conflict with composition and herding. Those hours from dusk to after midnight are critical to developing market strategy or finding new material. You

have to have rest to be a herder or a scribe. But a good guess is that this art lover must have snoozed during part of the programs. Where was he, also, during the three-hour thunderstorm on one of the three nights?

The opera conductor who played the piano for our concert yesterday must have been under cover the stormy night, as fresh as he appeared. He played a lively gypsy folk song and dance he had written. His talents are so remarkable – conductor, pianist, author, and composer – that he doesn't have to put on an act; he can do so much. He may have tuned the piano he played on, far as that goes.

The line is thin between those who appreciate the music and those who act like they appreciate the music. Depends on background, analysts say. In my case it has taken a long time coming from a tissue paper comb beginning on the prairie to Mozart on a violin in a concert hall.

For acting, however, the years of concealing dread from the ground to a left stirrup to swinging the hind leg over the saddle on a young horse advanced my skill. The year a cowboy and I doctored 15 unbroken horses at the old ranch all summer increased the talent. We didn't have a patient that didn't try to repay our attention with a hoof or his teeth. We had to be brave, or we'd have given up.

One night after going to bed, ol' Sam asked, "Monte, you as skeered of that sorrel sapsucker as I am? He's going to kill one of us for sure, unless we choke him to death first."

Because we couldn't see each other's faces in the dark to tell how bad I was lying, I remember replying "Nah. I was just a little skittish from the way he kicked a spray bomb from my right hand about 10 feet in the air." Truth was, I wasn't scared; I was terrified the way that 1200 pounds of horseflesh could snort and roll his eyes and fall over in the pen from choking on our ropes.

But I didn't want to doctor those horses. I do want to go to these concerts. No chance of having to lie about the operas. You can tell folks ahead of time that I am not going to even one.